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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on how the differences that surface in a program can be effectively mediated by the design of the curriculum, i.e., how an integrated curriculum combined with a collegial teaching cohort can foster enhanced quality in teacher preparation and can reconcile differences in the philosophical orientation of faculty. The example of the teacher education program at the University of Dayton (Ohio) is cited, with emphasis on the junior year component--the BLOCK program. The BLOCK program, which includes all methods courses required of elementary majors, emphasizes depth and encourages faculty to engage in joint planning and advising with students. BLOCK students learn to evaluate different rule systems, ask critical questions, and derive principles of good teaching. The program utilizes the prescription-principle approach which enables faculty to identify what is important and ensures that students know certain requisite material. Students are challenged to question the limits and exceptions to what they know. An outline of the entire elementary curriculum (professional studies component) is provided in the appendix. (JD)

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Designing a Curriculum That Uses the Knowledge Base

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Designing a Curriculum That Uses the Knowledge Base

Knowledge base definition and integration is an issue of considerable debate in the current teacher education literature. For the purposes of this paper teacher educators will be placed within one of two conceptual camps.[1] Empiricist teacher educators view the knowledge base as a relatively stable corpus of competencies and skills that everyone must know and be able to exhibit (see McNergney, Lloyd, Mintz, and Moore, 1988). This orientation is particularly characteristic of those who search for a scientific basis for teaching behavior (e.g., Gage, 1978). For such teacher educators effective teaching consists, in large part, of using empirically derived generalizations to identify techniques and methods of "best practice" to be used by teachers (Tom, in press).

A second group of teacher educators, the interpretivists, views the preservice curriculum as more dynamic, something evolved from and influenced by the meaning attributed to events by the individuals involved in those events (see Tom, in press). For them the curriculum is not an established set of competencies but rather an emergent body of knowledge,

skills, and orientations that necessarily change with time and according to instructional situation because the knowledge that does emerge is socially constructed and contextually dependent.

Within the teacher education community, and often within a particular institutional setting, a tension has surfaced between the empiricists and interpretivists. If the extant literature is an indication of current practice, it seems that empiricists have dominated methods-course instruction and that the interpretivists have claimed the foundations-related classes.

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on how the differences that surface in a program can be effectively mediated by the design of the curriculum: namely, how an integrated curriculum combined with a colleagial teaching cohort can foster enhanced quality in teacher preparation and can reconcile differences in the philosophic orientation of faculty. Curricular fragmentation and faculty isolationism is engendered when faculty are not given opportunities to work together in the curriculum development process. Faculty isolationism not only mitigates the impact of

individual faculty members on the pedagogical knowledge of preservice teachers but also dramatically limits the overall effectiveness of the professional curriculum.

Assumptions

Certain fundamental assumptions ground curriculum development. An institution that seeks to evolve a professional curriculum must build on the strengths of faculty from a variety of philosophical postures while it focuses faculty attention on a common goal--effective teacher education.

Because of the complexity and diffuseness of the pedagogical literature, an institution must first define a unifying theme or themes for its professional curriculum. Such themes can take many forms (see Short, 1987; Gideonse, 1986; Zeichner; 1983, Katz and Raths, 1985). The themes provide a structure or schemata on which to build concepts and ideas that will serve as a foundation for the curriculum. The themes define in a broad sense what the institution identifies as "good teaching." Without such a thematic definition, the teacher education curriculum becomes, as Tom (1987 a) argues, "nothing more than a means for

preparing teachers to replicate current school practice. Teaching becomes translation, with no moral perspective being introduced into the teaching-learning process" (p. 30).

Second, the teacher education curriculum should be "focused" rather than "expanded." Emphasis on some knowledge or skills learned well is preferable to many ideas and skills learned poorly (see Lasley and Watras, in press; Sizer, 1984). Institutions that "overfeed" usually leave students more stuffed than nourished. Like a well-planned diet, the curriculum of teacher education must consist of reasoned portions of carefully selected curricular components (i.e., classroom management, planning, etc.) and of selected perspectives within those components (e.g., for classroom management teacher educators may focus on only two or three management theories). The burden on teacher educators is to help students see the limitations, strengths, and pedagogical uses of the knowledge and skills that prospective teachers are expected to acquire. The knowledge and skills should be framed within the context of both prescriptions and principles of practice. The prescriptions (Porter,

1988) are "micro-level detailed statements of effective teaching behaviors" (p.8). If understood, examined critically, and used successfully by preservice teachers, narrow and focused prescriptions (e.g., use of wait-time) help to shape teacher behaviors that are subsequently guided by higher principles of practice, such as those that enable students to become effective critical thinkers. Problems arise when teacher educators focus on either prescriptions or principles in isolation. The former results in teachers who are technicists, dominated by reductionist thinking; the latter, in teachers who are idealists frustrated by their inability to actualize broadly framed principles of best practice. These idealists also become susceptible to acts of pedagogical authoritarianism: once they begin teaching they often "buy" the nicely packaged programs of experts (Hunter, Canter) who do a better job of selling their pedagogical wares than did the faculty involved in preservice education. Hunter and others make "the sell" easily because teacher education graduates do not own, beyond the level of semantic knowledge (Berliner, 1985), the skills and understandings they acquired in teacher preparation

experiences. By starting with a smaller set of prescriptions and principles and then encouraging thoughtful, reflective use of those skills in several contexts, preservice teachers can possess the requisite procedural and semantic knowledge; more important, as beginning professionals, they are in a better position to criticize new models as they are exposed to them. Reflective use of knowledge and skills is enhanced by the collaboration of empiricists (those emphasizing prescriptions) and interpretivists (those emphasizing principles). Although their philosophies of teaching differ, their desire to prepare teachers who possess skills that foster cognitive and affective growth in students serves as the common impetus for better teacher preparation practices.

The University of Dayton Curriculum

The University of Dayton teacher education curriculum is primarily focused upon undergraduate teacher education. The University is not a Holmes Group institution and, though it embraces many of the principles of the Holmes Group, does not anticipate involvement in Holmes.

The proposed conceptual theme of the University of Dayton program is "teacher as decision maker."[2] Students who seek certification through the University of Dayton begin professional coursework as first-year (freshmen) students and have field and clinical work each year they are at the University. In each course students examine what it means to be a professional decision maker, with some course components emphasizing the theoretical "prescriptions" of best practice and other course elements embracing applied principles of teaching. The BLOCK, which is the focus of this paper, is the junior-year component of the elementary education curriculum and includes all methods courses required of elementary majors. An outline of the entire elementary curriculum (professional studies component) is provided in the Appendix.

Prior to 1987, students completed professional education courses in a relatively random fashion. Courses overlapped considerably; instructors were responsible for their own courses, and few saw any need to identify how their coursework related to the ideas of other faculty. In 1987, the elementary education faculty developed a new curriculum design that

collapsed all methods courses into one BLOCK of courses to be taken in the junior year. As a result, math, science, reading, social studies, art, and music courses were combined and conceptually interrelated. Students in the BLOCK have to teach a select number and type of lessons; the lesson types are specified by the BLOCK instructors. Students learn fewer skills than they did in the previous curriculum (e.g., they learn just one lesson design model), but they spend more time testing the ideas they learn and engage in more reflection vis-a-vis the strengths and weaknesses of acquired pedagogical skills.

The notion behind the BLOCK concept was to emphasize depth, not breadth, and to encourage faculty to engage in joint planning and advising with students. Each student in the BLOCK (approximately 50 per semester) has individual conferences with course instructors and is observed teaching a select number of lessons. Three specially trained observers who have no specific BLOCK teaching responsibilities but who are grounded in the curricular content are available to assess the students' pedagogical decision making in the field setting.

The BLOCK enabled faculty to create a more coherent and

rigorous curriculum and resulted in the elimination of five hours of education courses. The elimination of coursework was made possible by the diminution of conceptual redundancies in the curriculum. The reduction of professional courses also made it possible to require more study for elementary education students in the arts and sciences.

Conceptual Specificity

A basic issue in the knowledge base definition process for the University of Dayton curriculum was the level of specificity used to describe conceptual elements in the curriculum. Empiricist faculty tend to work at an atomistic level and seek prescriptions for teaching. Such prescriptiveness results, according to Porter (1988) "in highly elaborated scripts for good teachers to follow" (p. 8). Exclusive reliance on prescriptions causes teachers to adhere to a rigid pattern of procedures and routines for communicating ideas to students (e.g., Madeline Hunter's seven steps). On the other hand, interpretivists who use a broader definition are inclined more toward principles that have been generally defined. For them the

curriculum emerges as a result of myriad social and interpersonal interactions. The curriculum is not a specific set of empirically derived competencies, but rather a body of knowledge that emerges in direct proportion to the needs of the prospective teachers. Such a curriculum is characterized by general guidelines and dispositions, not "right" answers or prescriptions.

Tom (1987b) describes educational phenomena as having an ontological basis, with some researchers viewing classroom events as natural and stable and others perceiving them as socially constructed. Those whose rationale for inquiry treats phenomena as natural tend to look for law-like outcomes or prescriptions (e.g., Brophy); those who view educational phenomena as socially constructed (e.g., Zeichner) look more closely at the political and ethical issues associated with teaching practice.

Empiricists' efforts to define the curriculum using the extant knowledge base have been grounded on Tom's (1987b) second level of "generalization." For instance, Gage (1978) formulated low-inference "teacher should" statements that are written in the form of descriptive generalizations:

> During reading-group instruction, teachers should give a maximal amount of brief feedback and provide fast-paced activities of the "drill" type. (p.39)

Prospective teachers who are in the first phases of teacher education potentially benefit from the "apparent" simplicity of treating educational phenomena as natural. They are more dualistic in their thinking (see Perry, 1980), tend to think in terms of right or wrong instructional answers, and are less able to deal with the complexities of context-dependent statements for effective teaching (see Reyes, 1987). Hence it may be pedagogically sound for program curricula to offer theoretical prescriptions in introductory professional studies classes (University of Dayton EDT 207 and 208) and principles at the more advanced levels (the BLOCK classes). Prescriptions treat classroom events as relatively stable and natural: principles, on the other hand, deal with more complex interactive and ethical dimensions of classroom life and require active questioning and reexamination of the theoretical prescriptions taught in the introductory courses. The very real demands of teaching practice require teachers to possess not only specific skills and competencies (prescriptions) but also the ability to question and

build on those skills to create principles for effective practice.

Components within advanced professional experience (the BLOCK) are best organized around context-sensitive generalizations. Because the metamorphic nature of context generalizations is mediated by the students, the school, the teacher, and the setting, such generalizations require that the preservice teachers start from a certain point (i.e., possess a certain skill) and then adjust the use of that skill accordingly. For example, if entry level preservice teachers started with a prescription such as "Teachers should have a system of rules that allow pupils to attend to their personal and procedural needs without having to check with the teacher" (Gage, 1978, p. 39), they would then analyze the rules of practicing teachers to determine whether the rules were understandable and reasonable. Finally, they might read case studies of how teachers teach rules to students.

When the preservice teachers are involved in the BLOCK they begin to evaluate different rule systems and to assess the impact of these rule systems on students' growth and development by asking some critical

questions: What are the effects of rules on student behavior? Are some rule systems unjust? Are there conditions under which rule systems are not needed? In essence, the prospective teacher moves through three phases: demonstration of certain technical knowledge, application of that technical knowledge in a real or simulated environment, and finally, reflection on the effects of that knowledge vis-a-vis students.

To summarize, prospective teachers tend to approach professional education experiences as dualistic thinkers who are inclined toward utilitarian views of classroom life (see Gehrke, 1987). Thus, teacher educators must first equip new teachers with requisite skills and understandings needed for survival and must then help them critically examine the relative strengths and weaknesses of each so that they can become what Barnes (1987) calls "knowledgeable novices." Such skills and understandings are manifested when an institution has established a limited number of prescriptions and created curricular conditions that enable the preservice teacher to evolve theoretical prescriptions into critically derived principles of good

teaching by the time they reach advanced levels of study.

Curricular Definition

Curriculum prescriptions and principles can be derived in essentially two ways: one requires passive student and faculty input; the second necessitates more active dialogue and thought. Institutions using passive approaches generate prescriptions and principles based on a review of extant instruments (e.g., institutions in Florida might create a teacher education curriculum based on a review of the Florida Performance Measurement System; those in North Carolina, on the Teacher Performance Assessment Instrument). Such methods are efficient, but they fail to engender faculty ownership of the curriculum. Passive approaches result in a list of skills with face value, but they limit the degree to which faculty reflect on the nuances and meaning of the skills for classroom practice and often result in resistance or even sabotage by those who find the skills anathematic. The skills become a form of legislated learning (Wise, 1988); as a result, curricular responsiveness is limited and faculty enmity is exacerbated.

Active curriculum development, a second method of evolving a curriculum (and the one being used by faculty at the University of Dayton) is an inherently complex and impassioned process in which faculty review and discuss new contributions to literature (e.g. Reynolds, 1989). Faculty discuss position papers on the dominant conceptual theme (indeed, even the need for themes!), review several sources and domains of knowledge for the identification of relevant prescriptions and principles, and debate the efficacy of these instructional principles for the classroom.

BLOCK faculty encourage students to treat the prescriptions they have learned and the principles they acquire as dynamic -- that is, something to be learned, but also analyzed. The skills and understandings that constitute the curriculum are dissected by students through an analysis of the principles, which serve as a basis for guiding the strategic decision making of the preservice teachers. By treating the principles as evolving "guides to best practice," BLOCK faculty insist on a measure of student understanding of selected (empirically derived) teacher behaviors while disposing students to judiciously and constantly question what they do.

Conclusion

The knowledge base of teaching is not something that can or should be universally confined to a specific body of literature or set of ideas. A conceptual theme (or themes) establishes an institutional direction for inquiry and practice. In the case of the (proposed) "teacher as decision maker" theme for the University of Dayton program, it enables students to learn certain requisite skills but to question when and how those skills and understandings should be used. The prescription-principle approach advocated in this paper enables faculty to identify what is important, to ensure that students know certain requisite material, and, most important, to question the limits of and exceptions to what they know.

Reference Note

1

There are numerous perspectives that could be identified and discussed in this regard (Tom, 1987b). For example, the work of critical theorists (e.g., Giroux, 1988) has been particularly prominent in discussions of curriculum issues during the past decade. The two positions highlighted here, empiricists and interpretivists, are representative of two salient philosophical orientations evidenced within the context of current teacher education policy development and implementation.

2

Faculty members in the Department of Teacher Education agreed to the theme of "decision maker" in 1988. However, because of limited ownership for the theme and given concerns regarding its pervasiveness in the curriculum, the notion of having a theme that conceptually drives the curriculum is being studied again (1990) in more depth.

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Appendix

Elementary Professional Studies Curriculum

Course	Level	Goal
EDT 110 - The Profession of Teaching	First Year	Develops within students a general awareness of the teaching field and provides direct opportunities for assessing their suitability for serving in the role of teacher.
EDT 207 - Child and Adolescent Education	Second Year	Focuses on the empirical principles of intellectual, moral, physical, personal, and social development as related to a teacher's performance in the classroom.
EDT 208 - Teaching and Learning	Second Year	Focuses on the empirical principles of learning such as reinforcement, discovery, motivation, and transfer.
EDT 290 - Mainstreamed Handicapped Students	Second Year	Focuses on special needs learners and the learning problems they face in the mainstreamed classroom.
EDT 360 - Children's Literature	Third or Fourth Year	Deals with the study of children's books to develop critical standards for judgment.
The BLOCK: EDT 296 - Teaching in in the Elementary School (prescription oriented) EDT 320 - Reading EDT 325 - Social Studies EDT 326 - Science and Math EDT 382 - Art and Music	Third or Fourth Year	Focuses on instructional principles particularly geared to content-specific concepts and ideas.
EDT 419 - Philosophy of Education	Fourth Year	Requires students to critically examine their own educational philosophy and to reflect on more general philosophic perspectives in the literature.